

**FIGURE 3-3** Immigration by country. The United States has by far the largest number of immigrants—that is, permanent residents who were born in other countries. Other more developed countries, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, also have relatively large numbers of immigrants.

era began in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated in the early twentieth century. The third era began in the 1970s and continues today. The three eras have drawn migrants from different regions. Most immigrants were English or African slaves during the first era, nearly all were European during the second era, and more than three-fourths were from Latin America and Asia during the third era.

Although the origins vary, the reason for migrating has remained essentially the same: Rapid population growth limited prospects for economic advancement at home. Europeans left when their countries entered stage 2 of the demographic transition in the nineteenth century, and Latin Americans and Asians began to leave in large numbers in recent years after their countries entered stage 2. But Europeans arriving in the United States in the nineteenth century found a very different country than Latin Americans and Asians who have recently arrived.

## Colonial Immigration from England and Africa

Immigration to the American colonies and the newly independent United States came from two sources: Europe and Africa. Most of the Africans were forced to migrate to the United States as slaves, whereas most Europeans were voluntary migrants—although harsh economic conditions and persecution in Europe blurred the distinction between forced and voluntary migration for many Europeans.

About 1 million Europeans migrated to the American colonies prior to independence, and another million from the late 1700s until 1840. From the first permanent English settlers

to arrive at the Virginia colony's Jamestown, in 1607, until 1840, a steady stream of Europeans migrated to the American colonies (and after 1776 to the newly independent United States of America). Although early migrants included some Dutch, Swedes, French, Germans, German-Swiss, Spanish, and Portuguese, 90 percent of European immigrants to the United States prior to 1840 came from Great Britain.

Most African Americans are descended from Africans forced to migrate to the Western Hemisphere as slaves. About 400,000 Africans were shipped as slaves to the 13 colonies that later formed the United States during the eighteenth century, primarily by the British. The importation of Africans as slaves was made illegal in 1808, but another 250,000 Africans were brought to the United States during the next half-century (see Chapter 7).

## Nineteenth-Century Immigration from Europe

In the 500-plus years since Christopher Columbus sailed from Spain to the Western Hemisphere, about 65 million Europeans have migrated to other continents. For 40 million of them, the destination was the United States. The remainder went primarily to the temperate climates of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa, and southern South America, where farming methods used in Europe could be most easily transplanted.

For European migrants, the United States offered the greatest opportunity for economic success. Early migrants extolled the virtues of the United States to friends and relatives back in Europe, which encouraged still others to come.

The total flow of European migrants to the United States ~~the number from individual countries has varied from year to year~~. Among European countries, Germany has sent the most number of immigrants to the United States, 7.2 million. Other major European sources include Italy, 5.4 million; United Kingdom, 5.3 million; Ireland, 4.8 million; and Russia, the former Soviet Union, 4.1 million. About one-fourth of Americans trace their ancestry to German immigrants, and one-eighth each to Irish and English immigrants.

Note that frequent boundary changes in Europe make precise national counts impossible. For example, most Poles migrated to the United States at a time when Poland did not exist as an independent country. Therefore, most were counted as immigrants from Germany, Russia, or Austria.

**FIRST PEAK OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION.** The level of immigration to the United States surged during the 1840s and 1850s (Figure 3-4). Around 4.3 million people migrated to the United States during those two decades, more than twice as many as in the previous 250 years combined. Immigration peaked from approximately 20,000 per year during the first years of independence to over 250,000 in the peak migration years of the 1840s and 1850s.

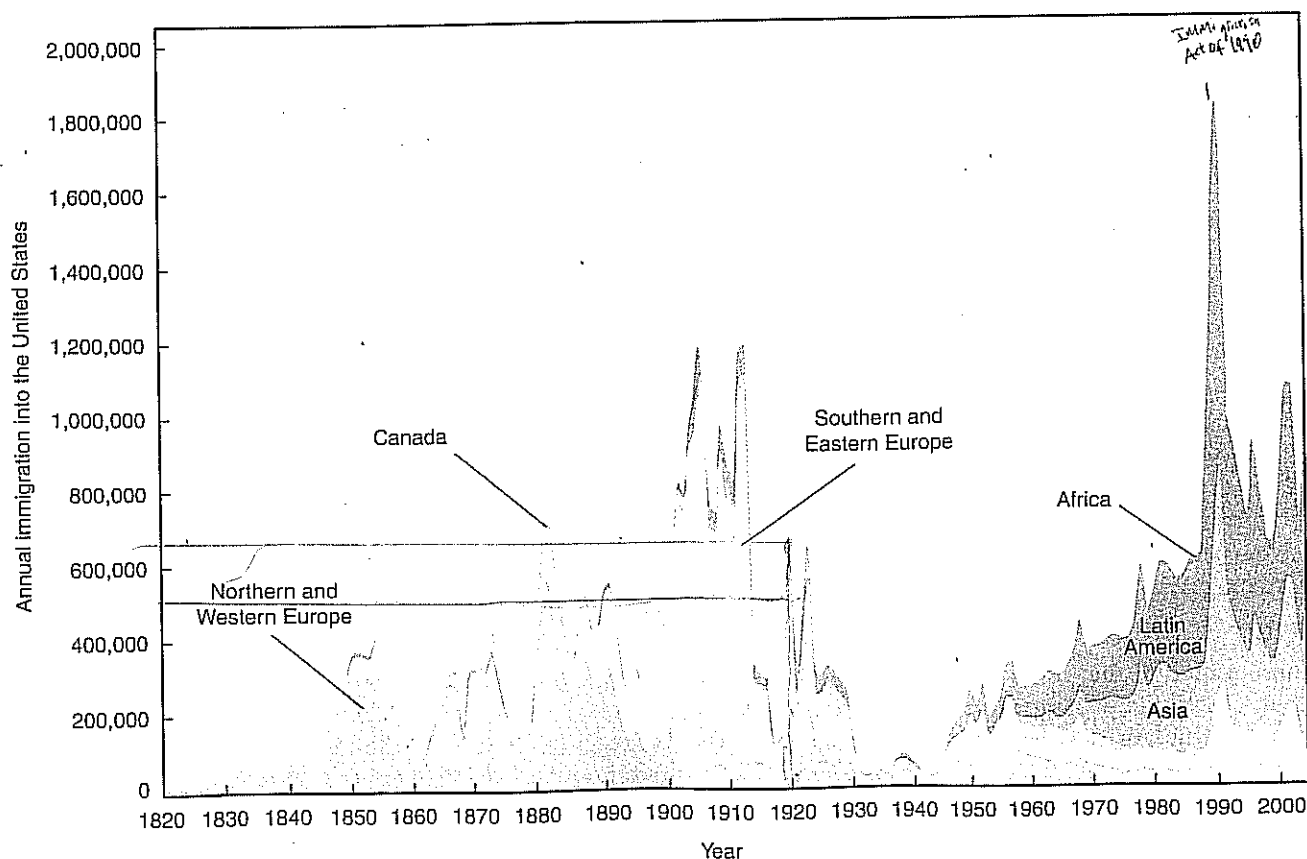
During the 1840s and 1850s, more than 95 percent of all U.S. immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe, including one-fifth from Ireland and another one-third from Germany. At the same time, desperate economic push factors compelled the Irish and

Germans to cross the Atlantic. Germans migrated to escape from political unrest, as well as from poor economic conditions.

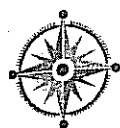
**SECOND PEAK OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION.** U.S. immigration declined somewhat during the 1860s as a result of the Civil War (1861–65), but it began to climb again in the 1870s. Immigration reached a second peak during the 1880s, when more than a half-million people annually immigrated to the United States.

Again, during the late 1800s, most immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe. Germans accounted for one-third, and the Irish still constituted a large percentage. However, other countries in Northern and Western Europe sent increasing numbers of migrants, especially the Scandinavian countries of Norway and Sweden. The industrial revolution had diffused to these countries, and the population was growing rapidly as a result of entering stage 2 of the demographic transition (rapidly declining crude death rates). Most who could not find land to farm at home—such as those whose older siblings had inherited their parents' farm—migrated to the cities. But some decided to migrate to other countries in search of farmland or jobs in foreign cities.

**THIRD PEAK OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION.** Economic problems in the United States discouraged immigration during the early 1890s, but by the end of the decade, the level reached a third peak. Nearly a million people each year immigrated during the first 15 years of the twentieth century. The record year was 1907, with 1.3 million immigrants.



**FIGURE 3-4** Migration to the United States by region of origin. Europeans comprised more than 90 percent of the immigrants to the United States during the nineteenth century, and even as recently as the early 1960s, still accounted for more than 50 percent. Latin America and Asia are now the dominant sources of immigrants to the United States.



## CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIC TOOLS

### Claiming Ellis Island

Twelve million immigrants to the United States between 1892 and 1954 were processed at Ellis Island, situated in New York Harbor. Incorporated as part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument in 1965, Ellis Island was restored and reopened in 1990 as a museum of immigration. Before building the immigration center, the U.S. government used Ellis Island as a fort and powder magazine beginning in 1808.

An 1834 agreement approved by the U.S. Congress gave Ellis Island to New York State and the submerged lands surrounding the island to New Jersey. When the agreement was signed, Ellis Island was only 1.1 hectares (2.75 acres), but beginning in the 1890s, the U.S. government enlarged the island, eventually to 10.6 hectares (27.5 acres).

New Jersey state officials claimed that the 10.6-hectare Ellis Island was part of their state, not New York. The claim was partly a matter of pride on the part of New Jersey officials to stand up to their more glamorous neighbor. After all, Ellis Island was only 1,300 feet from the New Jersey shoreline,

yet tourists—like immigrants a century ago—are transported by ferry to Lower Manhattan more than a mile away. More practically, the sales tax collected by the Ellis Island museum gift shop was going to New York rather than to New Jersey.

After decades of dispute, New Jersey asked the U.S. Supreme Court in 1993 to rule on its claim to Ellis Island. The Supreme Court in May 1998 ruled 6–3 that New York owned the original island but that New Jersey owned the rest. New York's jurisdiction was set as the low waterline of the original island.

Critical evidence in the decision consisted of a series of maps prepared by New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) officials using geographic information systems (GIS). And after ruling in favor of New Jersey's claim, the Supreme Court directed the NJDEP to delineate the precise boundary between the two states, again using GIS.

New Jersey officials scanned into an image file an 1857 U.S. coast map that was considered to be the most reliable from that era.

The image file of the old map was brought into Arc-View, and then the low waterline shown on the 1857 map was edited and depicted by a series of dots. The perimeter of the current island was mapped, using global positioning system (GPS) surveying. Also mapped was the surviving portion of the wall of the original fort built on the island in the early nineteenth century. Overlaying the 1857 low waterline onto the current map identified New York's territory, and the rest of the current island belonged to New Jersey.

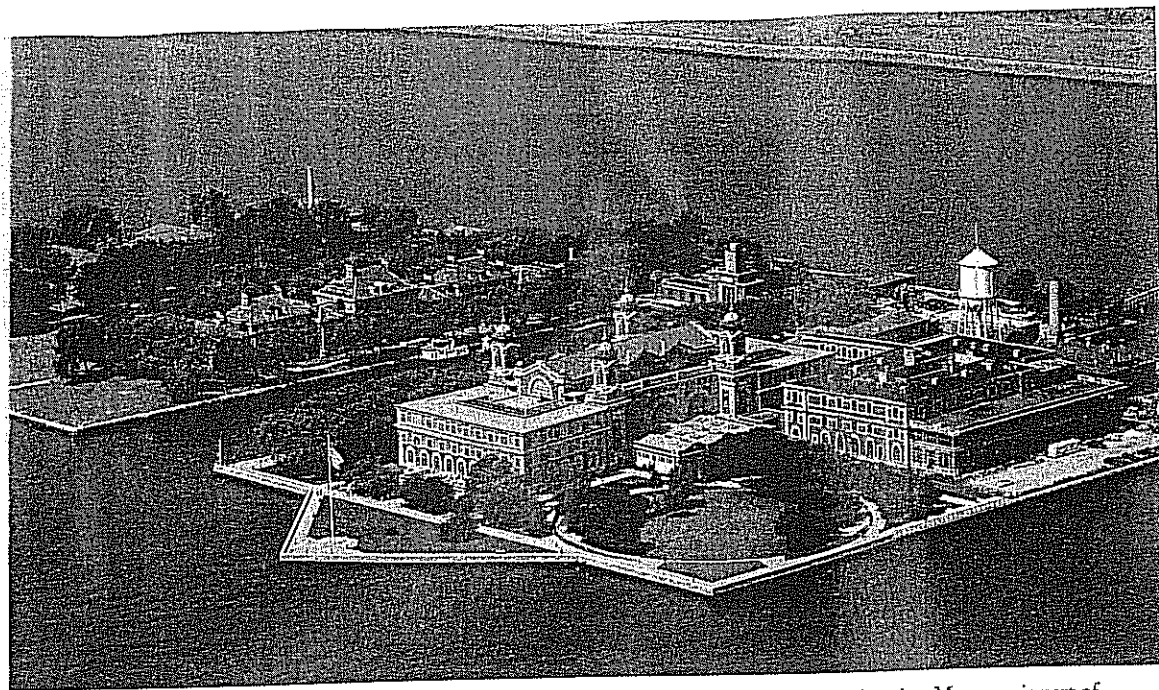
New Jersey officials celebrated the legal victory by raising the state flag over Ellis Island at a July 4 ceremony. The island's zip code was changed from a New York to a New Jersey number. A footbridge was built from Jersey City so that visitors could bypass the ferry from Manhattan (Figure 3–1.1). Joked former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, "They're still going to convince me that my grandfather, who he was sitting in Italy thinking of coming to the United States, getting on that ship in Genoa, was saying to himself, 'I'm coming to New Jersey'."



FIGURE 3–1.1 New York Harbor. Ellis Island connected to New Jersey by bridge. Liberty Island, containing the Statue of Liberty, is south of Ellis Island.

During the third peak, more than 90 percent of immigrants were European. But instead of coming from Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany, most came from countries that previously had sent few people. Nearly one-fourth each came from Italy, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. (Austria-Hungary encompassed portions of present-day Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine.)

Immigrants came from Southern and Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century for the same reason that Northern and Western Europeans had migrated in the previous century. The shift in the primary source of immigrants coincided with the diffusion of the industrial revolution from Northern and Western Europe to Southern and Eastern Europe. The populations of these countries grew rapidly as a result of improved technology and health care.



Ellis Island. The large building in the foreground, which includes the Great Hall, now the Immigration Museum, is part of New York State, but the rest of the island is part of New Jersey.

For many, the option of migrating to the United States proved irresistible.

At the peak of immigration around 1910, 13 million U.S. residents were either born in a foreign country or had at least one foreign-born parent. This amounted to 14 percent of the country's total population of 92 million. These recent immigrants comprised more than 20 percent of the population in northeastern states, across a northern tier between Michigan and Montana, and along the Pacific Coast.



Echo Canyon in northeastern Utah, a 40-kilometer (25-mile) narrow passageway, was one of the many obstacles faced by wagon trains crossing the American West during the nineteenth century.

## Recent Immigration from Less Developed Regions

Immigration to the United States dropped sharply in the 1930s and 1940s during the Great Depression and World War II. During the 1930s, only 50,000 immigrants a year arrived in the United States, and the number of emigrants leaving the United States actually exceeded the number of immigrants by one-fourth. The number of immigrants to the United States steadily increased during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and then surged during the past quarter-century to historically high levels. Latin America and Asia have provided most of the recent U.S. immigrants.

**IMMIGRATION FROM ASIA.** During the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, only 1 million Asians migrated to the United States, nearly all from China, Turkey, and Japan. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, about 7 million Asians arrived in the United States, and annual immigration from Asia increased from 40,000 in the 1960s to 150,000 in the 1970s to 280,000 in the 1980s and 1990s.

Asia was the leading source of immigrants between the late 1970s and late 1980s until overtaken by Latin America. The four leading sources of U.S. immigrants from Asia during the 1990s and 2000s have been China (including Hong Kong), Philippines, India, and Vietnam, which together have accounted for nearly two-thirds of all Asian immigrants in recent years (Figure 3-5).

Asians also comprise more than 40 percent of Canadian immigrants, but, compared to the United States, Canada receives a much higher percentage of Europeans and a lower percentage of Latin Americans. Canada, however, takes in 50 percent more immigrants per capita than does the United States.